

A close-up, low-angle shot of a Highland cow with thick, wavy, reddish-brown fur and long, curved, light-colored horns. The cow is grazing on green grass and weeds in a field. In the background, another cow is visible, and the sky is overcast and grey.

EARTHLING ED

**AN E-BOOK FOR VEGANS:
30 NON-VEGAN EXCUSES
& HOW TO RESPOND TO THEM**

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HELLO

Hey, I'm Ed and thank you for downloading my e-book! I released this e-book in early 2018 with the goal of creating a resource that vegans could use to help them learn how to debunk and argue against the most common excuses that people use to try and justify not going vegan, and continuing to harm animals.

Not long after I went vegan I was chatting to someone about veganism and they said, "but soya farming is really bad for the environment". In that moment I had no idea what to say back and couldn't explain why they were wrong. This really annoyed me and I couldn't help but feel like I had let the animals down and enabled this person to continue eating animal products with more of an eased conscience.

After this conversation I made it my task to research and learn as much as I possibly could about veganism and all the arguments that people use to justify eating, wearing and exploiting animals. I watched as many documentaries and YouTube videos on veganism as I could find, I read books and online resources - and I started practicing having conversations with people on the street.



I wanted to make sure that there would never be another conversation where I didn't know what to say back to someone when they were arguing against veganism.

I fully believe that we all have the power to be effective and strong activists for the animals, and I hope that this e-book will be a useful resource for you - and through reading it you will feel more confident and capable of having conversations with non-vegans.

Knowledge is power, and there really is **not one** single argument against veganism whatsoever. So once you have the knowledge, which I hope this e-book provides, nothing is stopping you from planting seeds in the minds of your family, friends and anyone else you discuss veganism with.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION TIPS

Before I get into the excuses I think it's important to first go through what I have found to be the most effective way of discussing and advocating for veganism, as this is also hugely important if we want to have productive conversations which benefit the animals.

One of the crucial things to remember when going into a conversation is that the person we are talking to is basing their judgement of veganism on that conversation and as such, it is important that we are rational and level-headed.

As frustrating as these conversations can be, it is also necessary to remain empathetic, polite and understanding. After all, most of us once used the same excuses and arguments against going vegan. Appearing irritated or acting intellectually or morally superior will only push those who we are speaking to further away.

Listening and seeming relatable are two of the most effective things to do, as it makes the person you are talking to feel more comfortable and less judged - and that's when you can have a genuinely effective conversation. I always approach a conversation from the position that I can always learn something new, as opposed to acting as if I think I know all there is to know. Take the arguments presented seriously, and use reasoning and logic to debunk excuses instead of resorting to visible annoyance and anger.

The most effective technique that I have found throughout my work is simply asking questions rather than giving answers. This method is called the ***Socratic Method***, which is a technique that was devised by the Greek philosopher Socrates and is used in therapy and counselling. By asking questions we allow the person we are having a conversation with to reach the conclusions on their own, without being told how they feel. That way whatever the person says in response to you, they know to be their genuine opinion. So when you ask a series of questions that highlights their cognitive dissonance when it comes to their perceptions of animals, you are prompting them to reveal it to themselves.

By using this method of asking questions, you stimulate critical thinking and draw out ideas that often create contradictions in the person you are talking to. This is so powerful and one of the most effective ways to plant seeds as you leave the person questioning themselves and working out on their own accord that their actions don't align with their morals.

Some examples of asking questions rather than giving answers could be:

"Do you think animal cruelty is wrong?", rather than "animal cruelty is wrong."

"Is there a humane way to kill an animal?", rather than "there is no humane way to kill an animal."

"Why do you think a cow produces milk?", rather than "a cow produces milk to feed their child."

"Do you think there is a difference between eating a dog and eating a pig?", rather than "there is no difference between eating a dog and eating a pig."

To give another example, I was once taking part in a street activism event where graphic footage was being screened to the public. Whilst watching the footage a man said to me "do we know that animals suffer though?". Instead of just saying, "yes, of course animals suffer." I prompted him to watch the screen which was showing footage of cows being slaughtered and I asked him, "well, what do you think? Do you believe these cows look like they are suffering?" - to which he replied, "yes, they are clearly suffering."

CAN YOU LOVE ANIMALS AND EAT THEM?

We live in a world of animal lovers, nobody (or at least very few people), say that they want to see pain inflicted on animals. Practically everyone agrees that animal cruelty is wrong and that those who are cruel to animals should be punished. This is why we have laws in place protecting the rights of animals, or at least certain animals.



But how can a world of animal lovers be the same world that also believes that the deaths of over 70 billion land animals¹ and as many as 2.7 trillion marine animals² a year is not only acceptable, but actively support its continuance, believing it is morally justifiable?

So can you love animals and eat them? The answer is no, of course you can't, because the two ideas contradict one another. Saying you love animals whilst eating their bodies and secretions is like saying "of course I can love my child and beat them". If an abusive parent said that they loved their child, but were also beating them we would think they were a psychopath. This demonstrates the disturbing and paradoxical ideologies we have as a collective society of 'animal lovers' who are in fact animal **eaters**.

To put this another way, if you love someone the last thing you want to happen to them is for them to be forcibly impregnated, tortured, murdered and eaten, let alone pay for these things to happen to them. If you love someone then you want to avoid bad things happening to them at all costs, so if you love animals then by default the last thing you would ever want is to see their murdered body parts on a plate in front of you.

This can even be put in simpler terms. If you are talking to a non-vegan and they have a companion animal such as a dog, ask them if it would be possible to claim that they loved their dog if they mutilated and murdered them.

To be a lover of animals is to love, respect and show compassion to them, all of them, not just the ones society tells us to love. To truly be an animal lover, we have to acknowledge that all animals are worthy of life and deserve to live their life free from human oppression.

¹ https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/animals-slaughtered-for-meat?country=-OWID_WRL

² <http://fishcount.org.uk/fish-count-estimates-2>

When someone who eats animal products claims to be an animal lover, simply say "can you really be an animal lover if you pay for animals to be hurt?" - chances are they've never thought about their relationship with animals in this way before.

EATING ANIMAL PRODUCTS IS MY PERSONAL CHOICE

"Respect my opinion! It's my personal choice to eat meat, don't force your views on to me!" - of all the excuses used to defend eating animal products, this could well be the most common. So is eating animals a personal choice, or is it more complex than that?



This is quite an interesting excuse as arguably it is a choice, however using this logic it would also be morally justifiable to beat a dog or kick a cat, as it is a personal choice to do so.

In this situation ask the person, "if someone makes the personal choice to abuse a dog, does that make it morally justifiable?".

This argument perfectly demonstrates our detachment from the fact that animal products came from a living being. As a society we hold animals with such little regard that we don't consider their lives worthy of consideration, thinking of the consumption of animal products in a way that only affects us as individuals.

As vegans, we are often met with "you should respect my personal choice". However, vegans do respect the personal choice of others. We respect the choice of the animals who are exploited and treated as nothing other than a disposable commodity.

Furthermore, we respect the views of the humans who are also victims within the systems of animal exploitation - and we even respect the view of the person we are talking to, the view that they probably want to live a long life by caring enough to tell them that consuming animal products hugely increases their risk of cancer, diabetes, strokes, dementia, heart disease and many other major diseases plaguing our species³.

So when people so defiantly tell us to respect the views of others, the question is, which other view point are they considering other than their own?

It is not morally justifiable to murder just because the murderer personally made the choice to murder. It is not morally justifiable to kick and beat a dog just because the abuser personally made the choice to kick and beat the dog, and it is not morally justifiable to pay for animals to be exploited and killed, just because we can make the choice to pay for animals to be exploited and killed.

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=30gEiweaAVQ>

When someone uses the “my personal choice” argument, simply ask them, “what about the personal choice of the animal?”

I LIKE THE TASTE & I COULDN'T GIVE IT UP

When it boils down to it, the number one reason people eat animal products is because they enjoy the taste - I know I certainly did, in fact like most people I loved the taste of animal products. I think one of the most disconcerting things about the taste excuse though, is that it is an excuse that bluntly admits that the personal desires of an individual matter more than the moral concerns surrounding an animal's life and unquestionably horrific death.



However, it doesn't mean that the person using this excuse necessarily believes that their taste preferences are more important than an animal's life (most people I talk to don't), but because they've never been asked about it before they've never had to confront the fact that through their actions they are placing their taste higher. This is why when people say to me, "I love the taste of meat" or, "I could never give up cheese" I like to ask them, "do you value your taste buds higher than the life of an animal?" - most people will say no, but if they do say yes make sure to ask them why.

One of the big issues with this excuse is that it seeks to validate a non-vegan diet by claiming that we shouldn't be held responsible for our immoral consumer habits because our sensory impulses are too strong to be suppressed and as such, we can't be held morally accountable for the actions that we make.

But where do we draw the line? Would this argument hold up in court if a murderer in their own defence said, "but I could never give up murdering because I enjoy it too much."?

It requires more than sensory pleasure to morally justify something - and the inconvenience people go through by giving up cheese, for example, is not even remotely comparable to the pain a dairy cow goes through being forcibly impregnated repeatedly, having her children taken away from her and being pumped for her milk before she becomes too weak or old and is sent to be slaughtered.

I think one of the reasons why as vegans we find this excuse a really difficult one to hear is because it doesn't matter whatever product people claim they could never give up or enjoy the taste of, the difficulty and the inconvenience that it would be for them to no longer eat animal products is minuscule compared to the pain, suffering and fear that the animals have to go through.

A non-vegan meal lasts for 15 minutes, but the death of an animal is eternal. What food could ever be worth taking the life of an individual? An individual that felt fear, an individual that felt pain, an individual that felt confused and couldn't understand why such intolerable suffering was being forced upon them?



The fear of death is not unique to humans. Most of us fear dying and hope it will happen peacefully, surrounded by the ones we love without pain. The scariest thing we can think of is being tortured and ultimately murdered. We make horror films about this concept and it gives us nightmares. But this isn't a horror film for the trillions of animals that are slaughtered each year, it isn't a nightmare that they will wake from. It's real, the pain, the fear, it is all real - and then they die and they are gone forever.

We need only put ourselves in the position of the animals as they look up at the human who's about to murder them and imagine their fear and confusion to

understand why taste can never justify this incomprehensible atrocity. When talking to someone who uses the excuse of taste, try asking them the following questions:

“Do you not think we require more than sensory pleasure alone to morally justify an action?”

“Is it morally justifiable for someone to kill a dog if they like the taste?”

“What is it about being human that means the life of an animal is lower than our taste preferences?”

“Do you think it is acceptable to inflict pain, suffering and death onto an animal that wishes to avoid pain, suffering and death?”

“If we would hate to be exploited and killed, is it not hypocritical for us to exploit and kill others?”

Also, it's worth explaining that it's not as if people even have to give up the flavours of the animal products that they eat. There is now such a huge and varied selection of vegan alternatives to cheese, milk, eggs and meats. Explain that as vegans we eat burgers, hot dogs, burritos, nachos, lasagna, mac and cheese, curries, cheese pizza, cakes, cheesecakes, cookies, ice cream and everything else in between.

Explain how as vegans we experience all of the flavours and textures that we used to, except now they come from plants. No dead body parts, no gristle, no cholesterol, no hormones, no antibiotics. It's also really helpful to note where we can get these products from, and which restaurants now have vegan menus and options.

OTHER ANIMALS EAT OTHER ANIMALS

When confronted with the idea that the consumption of animals is done purely for the taste rather than for nutrition, (see [nutrition](#)) one of the most common excuses vegans hear is, “but animals eat other animals, so why shouldn’t we?”

As much as this may be true, some animals do indeed eat other animals, there’s many reasons as to why this statement holds no relevance whatsoever when discussing whether or not it is moral for us to consume animals.



Even though certain animals eat other animals, there are many more herbivorous animals than there are carnivorous ones. But regardless, what exactly is the relevance of what other animals do when applied to human behaviour? Some

animals rape and kill each other, so does that mean humans would be excused if they committed these acts too? When in conversation with someone who is using this excuse, try responding with, "wild animals kill each other, but does that mean it's morally justifiable for humans to kill each other, just because some wild animals do?".

Furthermore, lions have been documented killing their own cubs before, so using this line of logic it must therefore be acceptable for humans to kill their children as other animals have been shown to do so. In this situation you can continue by asking: "Do you think it's wise to base our morality on that of a wild animal?".

Animals also kill their food themselves, they don't pay others to kill on their behalf because they find the prospect of slaughtering an animal too traumatising. If we were naturally designed to eat meat we would have no objection to killing animals. We also wouldn't shelter the truth from our children, and yet we deem the reality of slaughterhouses to be too troubling and disturbing for a child.

Other animals kill out of necessity whereas humans do not, in fact eating animals is detrimental to our health. Humans kill other animals because we enjoy the way they taste, meaning we kill them for pleasure, even though this goes against many of our core morals. Many of us oppose animal exploitation when it comes to things like dog fighting or hunting as they are seen as unnecessary and only done for pleasure, and yet can't see that eating animals is also unnecessary and only done for pleasure. It's important to try and get people to make this connection so you can also ask, "are you an obligate carnivore?" and then say, "if you don't have to eat meat then why do you do so?". If they say it's because they like the taste, then ask, "are your tastebuds more important than a life?". As you can see, the circle of excuses tends to go round like a revolving door.

It is so unbelievably ironic that we deem ourselves so incredibly superior to animals (see [intelligence](#)), but when the superiority argument no longer functions as an effective excuse for murdering living beings, we suddenly portray ourselves as just a wild animal acting out our primal instincts.

So what are we, better than animals, or only animals? We can't be both.

WE NEED TO EAT ANIMAL PRODUCTS FOR NUTRITION

Hearing that we need to eat animal products in order to be healthy is a very frustrating excuse for a vegan to hear. However, many people truly believe that animal products contain nutritional elements that we cannot get elsewhere and that we need for our health and longevity, after all, there has to be a significant reason why we're doing all of these horrific things to animals, right?



The main nutrients that come up in conversations with non-vegans are protein, iron, calcium and B12.

I would strongly recommend watching and memorising the points in these four videos by *Bite Size Vegan* and M.D Michael Greger.

- 1) [Protein: Dr Michael Greger of nutritionfacts.org](#)
- 2) [Iron: Dr. Michael Greger of nutritionfacts.org](#)
- 3) [Calcium: Dr. Michael Greger of nutritionfacts.org](#)
- 4) [B12: Dr. Michael Greger of nutritionfacts.org](#)



When it comes to nutrition, I always like to make the point that The American Dietetic Association⁴ and The British Dietetic Association⁵, the largest bodies of nutrition and diet professionals in both countries, have both stated that a plant-based (vegan) diet is nutritionally adequate and safe for all stages of life, including pregnancy.

⁴ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/19562864/>

⁵ <https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/british-dietetic-association-confirms-well-planned-vegan-diets-can-support-healthy-living-in-people-of-all-ages.html>

This means that we can officially get all of the nutrients we need without eating animals or their secretions. Protein, iron, calcium and every other nutrient that we associate with animal products can be obtained *without the need* for exploiting animals.

In fact, consuming animal products has been linked to our top diseases and illnesses. Heart disease, type-2 diabetes, many forms of cancer, strokes, hypertension, dementia and osteoporosis have all been linked to the consumption of animal products⁶ - and many of our leading diseases can be prevented with a switch to a whole foods plant-based lifestyle.

There are an abundance of plant-based athletes across the world including Germany's strongest man Patrick Baboumian, NFL players such as David Carter and weightlifters such as Kendrick Farris.

Ask the person you're talking to if there is any necessity for us to eat animals and their secretions to be healthy, if they say "no", then say to them, "does this not therefore mean that doing these things to animals is an act of unnecessary cruelty?".

⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=30gEiweaAVQ>

EATING ANIMALS IS TRADITIONAL & CULTURAL

It's true that we have been eating animals for many centuries, but does the longevity of something justify its continuation and existence? Is the excuse, "eating animals is traditional and cultural" a valid justification for not becoming vegan?



If we look back at history we can see many, many atrocities that were committed by society under the guise of tradition - but does the fact that these things were once traditional justify them? I think (and hope) that most of us would say no. If humanity had gone through history too stubborn and ignorant to change because of so-called tradition then we would never have evolved or adapted.

What about female genital mutilation in 2021? It's been performed on women for centuries, it's deep rooted in tradition, and yet it is abhorrent. Ultimately, using the justification that eating animals is acceptable because it is traditional isn't logically or morally consistent. Tradition can never serve as any kind of justification for horrific acts.

To apply this argument to another scenario where non-human animals are the ones harmed, bullfighting is very much considered a tradition, as is the slaughter of dolphins in Taiji, but does that mean that these things should still continue?

The Yulin Dog Meat Festival and the Boknal Dog Meat Festival are both annual events where thousands of dogs and cats are killed and eaten, they are both traditional events and yet throughout the Western world we voice our disgust at these festivals. When people bring up tradition as a justification to eat animals, I like to ask: "The Yulin dog meat festival is traditional, do you think that makes it okay to butcher and kill dogs and cats?".

In terms of cultural identity, (think of Thanksgiving, or bullfighting) - should we really celebrate culture with violence? Especially when we can honour culture through music, dance and language? Cultural traditions cements us in our past transgressions. If humanity is to ever evolve past animal exploitation, we need to move past tradition-driven violence. Tradition has never and will never be a valid excuse for the acts we have committed as a species, and especially not for the continued murder and consumption of sentient life.

In a situation where someone uses tradition as an excuse, try asking:

“Is female genital mutilation morally justifiable because it is a tradition?”.

“Is the slaughter of dolphins in Japan morally justifiable because it is traditional?”

“Is bullfighting morally justifiable because it’s part of culture and tradition?”

“With these in mind, do you think culture and tradition are good indicators for our morality?”

OUR ANCESTORS ATE ANIMALS / WE EVOLVED BY EATING ANIMALS

When discussing veganism I often hear people proclaim, “you wouldn’t be here if your ancestors didn’t eat meat!” This is not necessarily incorrect, but why are we basing our morality on the actions of our ancestors, primitive beings that had no perception of modern day morality and did extremely unethical things to one another?



Surely if eating animals is acceptable because cavemen did it, then murdering a human today must also be morally justifiable as early humans murdered each other as well?

Ask the person you are talking to, "do you think it is wise to base our morality on the actions of our primitive ancestors?" Or, "if it's morally justifiable to eat animals because our ancestors used to do it, does that not mean that it must also be morally justifiable to murder each other, as our ancestors used to do that as well?"

Another thing people will say similar to the ancestors argument is that "we've always eaten meat". However, it is such a regressive idea to look into the past for guidance on how we should live today, and as stated before, basing our actions purely on whether or not we've done something for a long period of time is certainly not a good idea.

If anyone ever brings up the argument "we've always done it", ask them, "there was a time when treating a woman as less than a man was all we'd ever done, would that make treating a woman as less than a man morally acceptable today?"

Tied in closely with the ancestors argument is the idea that eating meat helped us evolve into the beings that we are today, and because of that it is morally justifiable to continue eating animals.

Even if this is true, it has no relevance to our society today as our brains are not developing every time we eat a big mac, nor are we evolving as a species every time we enter Nando's.

As explained in the section on nutrition, eating animal products is a hinderance to our health, as opposed to being beneficial. Consuming foods that have a negative

impact on our health can therefore not be considered helpful to the evolution of our species.

Couple that with the fact that animal agriculture is responsible for more greenhouse gas emissions than the combined exhausts of the transportation system combined⁷, and is the leading cause of rainforest destruction⁸, species extinction⁹, habitat loss¹⁰ and a whole host of other environmental concerns, it quickly becomes apparent that the future of our species depends on us not eating animals. The United Nations has in fact stated that the world needs to shift to a plant-based diet in order to avoid the worst effects of climate change.¹¹

Furthermore, there are also other theories as to why our brains developed. The first is that we began to eat cooked starchy foods and more carbohydrate dense foods. These starches would have been readily available and with the brain using 60% of the human body's blood glucose, such high glucose demands would not have been met on a low carbohydrate diet.

Now undoubtedly eating animals helped us survive through times of food scarcity, but

just as the very foundations of much our society was built upon slavery doesn't justify slavery in today's world, the fact that eating animals helped us get to this point or helped us survive in the past, doesn't justify eating animals in today's world.

In contemporary society we don't need to eat animals or their secretions and in doing so we are shortening our lifespan, destroying our planet and causing an unimaginable amount of unnecessary harm to innocent, living beings.

⁷ https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007%2F978-81-322-2265-1_10

⁸ <https://ourworldindata.org/what-are-drivers-deforestation>

⁹ <https://ourworldindata.org/env-impacts-of-food>

¹⁰ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0048969715303697>

¹¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2010/jun/02/un-report-meat-free-diet>

IF WE DIDN'T EAT ANIMALS THEY WOULD OVERRUN US OR GO EXTINCT

On face value this excuse can seem quite comical but actually I think it's an excuse that can seem very valid. This excuse is the idea that if we stopped eating animals they would all just be released and cause havoc to our environment, or they'd all be slaughtered and then just discarded.



To debunk this excuse all we have to do is highlight the fact that animal agriculture works on a system of supply and demand; when we buy products we demand that more be supplied. Because the world isn't going to go vegan overnight, and it will instead be a gradual process over a long period, this means that as more and more people go vegan, less and less animals will be bred in proportion with the rise of veganism.

As the movement continues to grow this would mean that when we eventually end up in a vegan world, farmers simply won't be breeding animals into production anymore. Consequently, we will never end up with a situation where billions of animals are being released into the wild or taken to the slaughterhouse to be killed and then discarded.

I've even had people tell me that it isn't vegan to be vegan because billions of animals would need to be slaughtered, but once we apply the supply and demand logic to this excuse it becomes easy to understand why that statement doesn't hold up.

The conversation will often move onto the person then arguing that this will mean that these animals will go extinct. This is quite an interesting argument, as obviously the number of these animals would decline exponentially to the point of extinction. Now there's a couple of ways of looking at this argument: firstly, the animals that we eat and exploit for food are not natural animals, they have all been domesticated, selectively bred and modified in some way that means they were never meant to exist.

Dairy cows have been modified to produce up to ten times more milk than they would naturally. Egg-laying hens have been bred to produce around 300 eggs a year. Broiler chickens have been bred to grow abnormally large at an incredibly

quick rate, and sheep have been modified to produce more wool than they would naturally and often give birth to more lambs than they would naturally.

Because of these modifications, it's very unlikely that any of these animals would be able to survive on their own in the wild and as such, they would need humans to care for and look after them. Ultimately, we would really end up with a choice of whether or not we wanted to sustain healthy populations of these animals or whether we think it would be more ethical to allow them to no longer exist and instead replenish our eco-systems with natural biodiversity. We would also theoretically be able to reintroduce many natural wild animals back into their habitats as we would no longer require such huge expansive areas of land for animal agriculture.

There would of course still be sanctuaries as well, where rescued animals would be allowed to live their life, and there will always be an abundance of people who would be happy to put the time and money into looking after animals and giving them the care that they need.

I think it's also important to note that many of these animals are not native to the countries which they are artificially bred into. For example, sheep are not native to America and shouldn't be there and unfortunately, it's the natural wildlife who are then the ones who face the consequences of this as their natural habitat is destroyed in order to make way for farming land. Native wild animals are also often hunted and killed in order to protect the farmers' flocks.

If someone mentions extinction, it's important to point out that animal agriculture is the leading cause of species extinction - and we are in the largest mass species extinction of the past 65 million years¹². So if they're concerned about species extinction, they should really go vegan.

¹² <https://www.pnas.org/content/114/30/E6089>

HUMAN RIGHTS ARE MORE IMPORTANT

It's funny how when you tell people that you are a vegan activist, or even just a supporter of animal rights, people all of a sudden become the most ardent humanitarians. The excuse, "but shouldn't we be concentrating on solving human issues" is then conjured up in act of defiant justification for continuing the consumption of animal products. But is this a justifiable excuse, should we fix human problems first?



One of the key problems with this excuse is it can be applied to anything. If someone was to say, "I think it's really important that we deal with helping the homeless" you could say, "but shouldn't we be worrying about fixing the crisis in Syria?"

Or to someone saying, "I think we need to address the slashing of benefits for the disabled" one could say, "but shouldn't we be more worried about the exploitation of garment workers in Bangladesh?" All of these issues need solving and nothing is achieved by devaluing any of them.

Being vegan is as simple as not eating animal products, not wearing animal skin, not purchasing cosmetics tested on animals and not supporting animal exploitation of any kind. So you can be a humanitarian and a vegan. You can volunteer at a homeless shelter and be vegan, and you can build schools and hospitals and still be a vegan. Being vegan is a passive action, it requires very little from the individual.

One of the main issues with this excuse is that it really highlights the underlying belief that many people have, which is that humans are not animals and we exist as separate or superior to the animal kingdom. It is a very clear indictment of the speciesist mentality our society has.

And beyond all of this, if we shifted to a vegan world we wouldn't just end animal exploitation, we could also end some of the most important human rights issues facing our species today.

We are currently growing enough food to feed over 10 billion people¹³ and yet in a world of less than 8 billion, around 820 million people are living in a state of hunger due to lack of food¹⁴ - food that we could easily produce but instead we choose to feed tens of billions of farmed animals so that we can eat their flesh. In fact, the United States alone could feed another 350 million people with the cropland that is used there to produce the feed for livestock animals.¹⁵

¹³ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/241746569_We_Already_Grow_Enough_Food_for_10_Billion_People_and_Still_Can't_End_Hunger

¹⁴ <https://www.who.int/news/item/15-07-2019-world-hunger-is-still-not-going-down-after-three-years-and-obesity-is-still-growing-un-report>

¹⁵ <https://www.pnas.org/content/115/15/3804>

If we all went vegan we would end the exploitation of migrant workers and people in poverty who work in slaughterhouses out of necessity and suffer from drug and alcohol abuse, repetitive strain injuries, PTSD, depression and anxiety.

If we all went vegan we would end the exploitation of tannery workers in places like India and Bangladesh. In fact, in some tanneries 90% of workers die before the age of 50¹⁶ and many workers are children who are forced to work with the poisonous chemicals required in the production of leather.¹⁷

If we all went vegan we would end much of the exploitation of indigenous groups in the Amazon, whose communities are being uprooted and destroyed so that the animal agriculture industries can destroy more of the rainforest.

When faced with the staggering facts that show just how much human exploitation is required to produce the animal products we eat and wear, it becomes obvious that any attempt to devalue the suffering of animals with that of humans is not only disingenuous but ill-conceived.

If confronted with this excuse you could try asking:

“Do you think it’s strange that we have enough food to feed over 70 billion land animals every year, yet there are 800 million people currently living in a state of starvation?”

Or, “how does the fact that there is war in the Middle East or people living homeless make it acceptable for us to pay someone else to kill and butcher an animal?”¹⁸

¹⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2012/dec/13/bangladesh-toxic-tanneries-intolerable-human-price>

¹⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/21/plight-of-child-workers-facing-cocktail-of-toxic-chemicals-exposed-by-report-bangladesh-tanneries>

PLANTS FEEL PAIN

This is an excuse that I hear a lot more often than I ever expected to. Even before I was vegan I never once considered that plants felt pain and suffered when we ate them and yet for some reason since going vegan, this something I am constantly told.

Firstly and most obviously, it's important to address the science behind this. A plant lacks a central nervous system, pain receptors and a brain, which means that anatomically they don't have the ability to feel pain.



If we also consider that the primary reason human and non-human animals feel pain is to alert us that we are in danger or are being hurt and that we need to escape the situation that we are in. A plant cannot move and thus any pain would be inescapable, making life torturous for any plant.

Which begs the question, why would plants ever evolve to be able to suffer if doing so doesn't serve the purpose that the ability to feel pain is supposed to provide?

If we now view the "plants feel pain argument" from a creationist point of view, why would a benevolent and compassionate God give such a horrible curse to plants? Why would he allow them to suffer so terribly, if it served no purpose for their survival?

I think part of where the confusion regarding plants and pain comes from is that it is true that they are alive and they conduct various activities at a cellular level, such as tilting to face the sunlight. In fact, plants are capable of doing some truly amazing things, but they do not conduct any activities at a conscious or cognitive level, in essence meaning that plants are not sentient.

I think a really good way of highlighting this to people is to point out that plants react but they don't respond. A venus fly trap shuts itself on a fly, not because it is consciously aware that a fly has landed onto it, but because it reacts to the pressure stimuli being triggered when the fly lands onto it. This is why the venus flytrap will close around anything that triggers this response, including cigarettes butts. A cow on the other hand consciously responds and so won't eat cigarette butts just because someone puts them in their mouth.

If we move past the science of whether or not plants feel pain and concentrate on the ethics of the excuse, I am doubtful that anyone truly believes that dropping a cauliflower into boiling water and boiling chickens alive (something that often happens in the chicken slaughtering process) is the same thing. Nobody thinks that slicing the neck of a cow is similar to cutting the stems off a broccoli, or castrating a pig is similar to peeling a potato.

But say the person you are talking to is determined that plants feel pain like animals do - vastly more plants are used in the production of animal products than they are the production of plant-based products.¹⁹ On top of this, it's important to note that up to 80% of Amazon rainforest destruction is due to cattle ranching alone²⁰, meaning that millions of trees have been and continue to be destroyed because of our consumption of animal products.

So if the person you are speaking to truly believes that plants feel pain and are sentient, then remind them that by consuming non-vegan products they are not only causing suffering to animals, but are also causing suffering to more plants as a result of not being vegan.

To be honest, if this excuse comes up I often avoid talking about the science of whether or not plants have the ability to feel pain as sometimes people will say, "but science has only gone so far" and they get stuck with that point. Instead, I often just go straight into talking about the amount of crops killed for animal products, so perhaps try asking:

"For the sake of discussion, let's say plants do feel pain. Did you know that it takes significantly more plants to create animal products than it does plant products, so vastly more plants are 'murdered' for a non-vegan diet than they are a vegan diet?"

You could also ask, "if you were driving down the road and a dog jumped out in front of your car, would you swerve onto a bed of flowers to avoid hitting the dog?" - This reinforces in people's minds that there is morally a difference between non-human animals and plants, as in that situation we would always choose to avoid the dog and instead hit the plants.

¹⁹ <https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/feed-required-to-produce-one-kilogram-of-meat-or-dairy-product>

²⁰ https://www.panda.org/discover/knowledge_hub/where_we_work/amazon/amazon_threats/unsustainable_cattle_ranching/

ANIMALS DON'T FEEL PAIN & DON'T SUFFER THE SAME AS WE DO

Continuing on from the excuse "plants feel pain", I think it is also important to discuss whether or not animals feel pain, or at least do they feel pain the same as humans, as people do sometimes question this. In fact, I've even been told before that non-human animals don't have brains, which was quite disturbing to hear.

We've had laws in place for a long time that require that we treat animals "humanely", now these are quite obviously ineffective, however the point is that we recognise that if we abuse a dog, we will be punished for doing so because we understand that the dog feels pain and has the capacity to suffer.

Another example would be the way that we slaughter animals, now obviously we as vegans recognise that what happens in slaughterhouses is anything but humane - humane slaughter, after all, is an oxymoron. It can never exist. However, what's important to note is that we do have methods in place that are there to supposedly reduce the suffering of the animals that we kill. The reason that this is important is because that means we acknowledge as a society that the animals we kill have the ability to feel pain and suffer.

From a scientific perspective, non-human animals have the same or at least almost identical areas of the brain involved in processing pain and show similar pain behaviours to humans. When our companion animals are in pain they act in ways suggestive of feeling pain, such as showing unusual behavioural traits like rocking

back and forth, emitting distress calls and changes in the rate and depth of breathing, such as panting. Humans in pain also display these behaviours.

When it comes to fish, many people believe that fish don't feel pain, however fish have been scientifically proven to feel pain²¹ and have also been shown to adopt uncharacteristic behaviours in situations that provoke pain. Furthermore fish have sensory neurons that are physiologically identical to humans. In fact when morphine has been administered to fish showcasing pain, their symptoms and responses disappeared, like they do in humans.



Sentient beings need to be able to feel pain in order to survive as it allows them to escape from dangerous situations and minimise potential injury. So let's broaden the argument and encapsulate emotional pain into the excuse used here.

We have established that animals feel physical pain, but it is also well documented that they experience emotional suffering just like us humans do. Mother cows mourn the kidnapping of their babies by crying for hours, orcas as well have been shown to

²¹ <https://efsa.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.2903/j.efsa.2009.954>

mourn the kidnapping of their offspring, and animals such as dogs have been shown to suffer from separation anxiety when their companion human leaves them on their own.

So now that we have established that animals feel both physical and emotional pain, the question becomes but do they feel pain as much as humans do? There seems to be an idea, an ignorant but nonetheless commonly accepted idea, that humans are more capable of suffering because we deem ourselves to be more intellectually sophisticated. However, it is plausible to consider that non-human animals could potentially suffer more.

If we compare the suffering that say a dog would go through breaking their leg, compared to the suffering a human would go through, it could be argued that a dog would suffer more because of certain cognitive differences. A human would know what the problem was and would know that it could be easily treated and that the pain will end. A dog on the other hand wouldn't understand what had happened in the same way and could be greatly confused by the pain. They also wouldn't have the same understanding as us that the pain will at some point end, arguably making their experience of the same event worse.

But really it is entirely irrelevant the exact degree of pain an animal feels. We all feel different degrees of pain, with some humans having a higher pain tolerance than others, but that doesn't justify inflicting unnecessary pain upon another human.

It doesn't matter what experience of pain you have, only that you are capable of having a feeling that you don't want to have. The same applies to animals, the fact that they can experience pain means that they have a preference to avoid it and by default, it is our moral obligation to ensure no unnecessary pain is caused to animals through our actions.

IT'S THE FOOD CHAIN

The food chains within nature are incredibly important, they symbolise something that is part of the natural order and exists within our ecosystems. They help to maintain healthy populations of animals and ensure that the natural ecology is balanced.

What we do to animals when we selectively breed, artificially inseminate, mutilate and farm them, before driving them in trucks to the slaughterhouse where we hang them upside down, kill them and drain them of their blood, is about as far removed from nature as possible and does not resemble anything like a food chain.



The food chain that we have created for ourselves is a human construct to try and conveniently justify an entirely unnecessary act - it ignores the complexity and interdependent web of life that forms our ecosystems. It is an appeal to nature fallacy that overlooks our ability to make moral decisions and instead claims that our actions are predetermined for us entirely by biological determinism.

We slaughter trillions of animals every year under the illusion and defence that it is a part of the natural world. We believe that because we have placed ourselves at the top of a hierarchical system we then have the right to exploit any life we deem to be beneath us. Every historical human atrocity ever committed has come under the illusion of self-appointed power.

The food chain excuse adopts the 'might means right' way of thinking, with people believing that because we have the physical ability to enslave and exploit others we are then morally justified to do so.

However, being in the position of power means that we have a responsibility to care for the vulnerable, and we have a moral obligation to care and look after those weaker or less able than we are. The food chains in nature exist because they have to. The predator needs to kill the prey to survive. But we don't have to kill anyone to live, which means that we don't have to use our dominance to kill others, in fact we can use our power to look after others and create a better world.

As humans we have moral agency, which means that we can make decisions based on a notion of right and wrong and most importantly we can be held accountable for the actions that we make. Our moral agency dictates to us that when we are in a situation where we have the choice to not inflict unnecessary suffering, we can and should be held accountable if we actively choose to inflict unnecessary suffering.

WE'RE MORE INTELLIGENT

As a species we pride ourselves on our intelligence and we have achieved some truly incredible things. Unfortunately, the idea that intelligence defines worth of life can often become one of the main driving forces as to why we justify raising and killing animals.



Straight away this idea creates a whole host of problems. For starters, pigs have been

shown to be more intelligent than dogs²², so surely we should be eating dogs, not pigs? Moreover, the animals that we eat, the cows, sheep, chickens, etc are more conventionally intelligent than many other animals that exist with us on this planet, so if we did eat animals according to their intelligence, we would instead be eating insects.

But if you think about it, if we eat specific animals according to their intelligence then we should be eating the least intelligent species, which are actually plants. Plants are the least intelligent species that exist as they lack the cognitive abilities that animals have, meaning that if we truly believe in the intelligence defines worth of life excuse then we should all be vegan anyway.

I used the phrase “conventionally intelligent” earlier because one of the other issues with this excuse is that intelligence is largely subjective. As Einstein famously said, “If you judge a fish on their ability to climb a tree they will spend their whole life believing that they are stupid.”.

But when you think about it, what exactly does intelligence have to do with worth of life? As a species most of us are very quick to take credit for work that others have done. People sometimes say, “but other animals have never built spaceships and been to space” - to which I ask, “have you ever built a spaceship and been to space?” Or people may say, “but we have written symphonies” - to which I ask, “have you ever written a symphony?”.

When someone brings up the intelligence argument, ask them:

“Does intelligence define worth of life?”

“Is your life worth more than someone who has learning difficulties?”

²² https://www.wellbeingintlstudiesrepository.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1042&context=acwp_asie

"If being intelligent means you have the right to be dominant, does that mean that anyone with a high IQ can do what they want to someone with a lower IQ?"

"Pigs have been shown to be more intelligent than dogs, does this fact mean that we should stop eating pigs and start eating dogs instead?"

I think it also has to be said that for all of our intelligence and technological advancements, we arguably do the least intelligent things of any species. We are the only species that is destroying our planet, the only home that we have. We are destroying the rainforests and the oceans at a frightening rate, and yet so little is being done to safeguard the future of even our own species.

Sadly if you look at our actions, one could easily conclude that they do not represent the actions of an intelligent species.

WE'RE DOING ANIMALS A FAVOUR BY GIVING THEM A LIFE

When it comes to 'livestock' animals people seem to use the excuse, "if it wasn't for us these animals would never have been given a life, they should be grateful." - let's start by applying this logic to humans. If a child is born into an abusive family where he or she is regularly beaten, is never fed and eventually dies from the abuse, would we think, "well at least that child's parents gave them a chance to experience life?"



Alternatively let's think about a Syrian child who has only ever known violence and fear. He sees his family killed by war and in an attempt to escape he joins other refugees in making the dangerous journey into Europe by boat. But the boat sinks in the ocean and the child, scared and confused as to why his existence has been so horrific, drowns. Should that child be grateful for the fact that they had the chance to exist? Would we be grateful?

What about non-human animals? If I breed dogs into existence and then I mutilate, abuse and kill them, am I a good person for giving those dogs an experience of life in the first place?

If I breed cats and then lock them in metal boxes that they can't escape from, never allow them to go outside or breathe fresh air, and then hang them upside down and cut their throats (like we do to billions of chickens), am I now a morally righteous person because without me those cats would never have been alive?

Ask the people you are talking to those questions. Put the animals that we love in the position of the animals that we eat and ask whether we are still good people for giving them an experience of life.

I find this excuse to be quite upsetting, as it really demonstrates how as a society we simply do not view animals as victims. They are not even worthy of that label, instead they should actually be grateful.

The simplest and most obvious way of deducing whether this is a good argument is to tap into our empathy. To really understand whether the so called 'life' we are giving these animals is such a favour we need only put ourselves in their position.

Put it this way, you're given the opportunity to exist, but in return you will be taken away from your mother, be forcibly impregnated repeatedly if you are female, and

each time you give birth you will have your children taken away from you. You will be in unrelenting pain, get excruciating infections and be abused by the people that hold you captive. When you are finally too weak to carry on, you collapse before being dragged to your own death. You are hung upside down, your throat is slit and you bleed to death. Would we accept that life? Would we be grateful and say, "thank you, how kind. If it wasn't for you I would never be given this wonderful opportunity!".

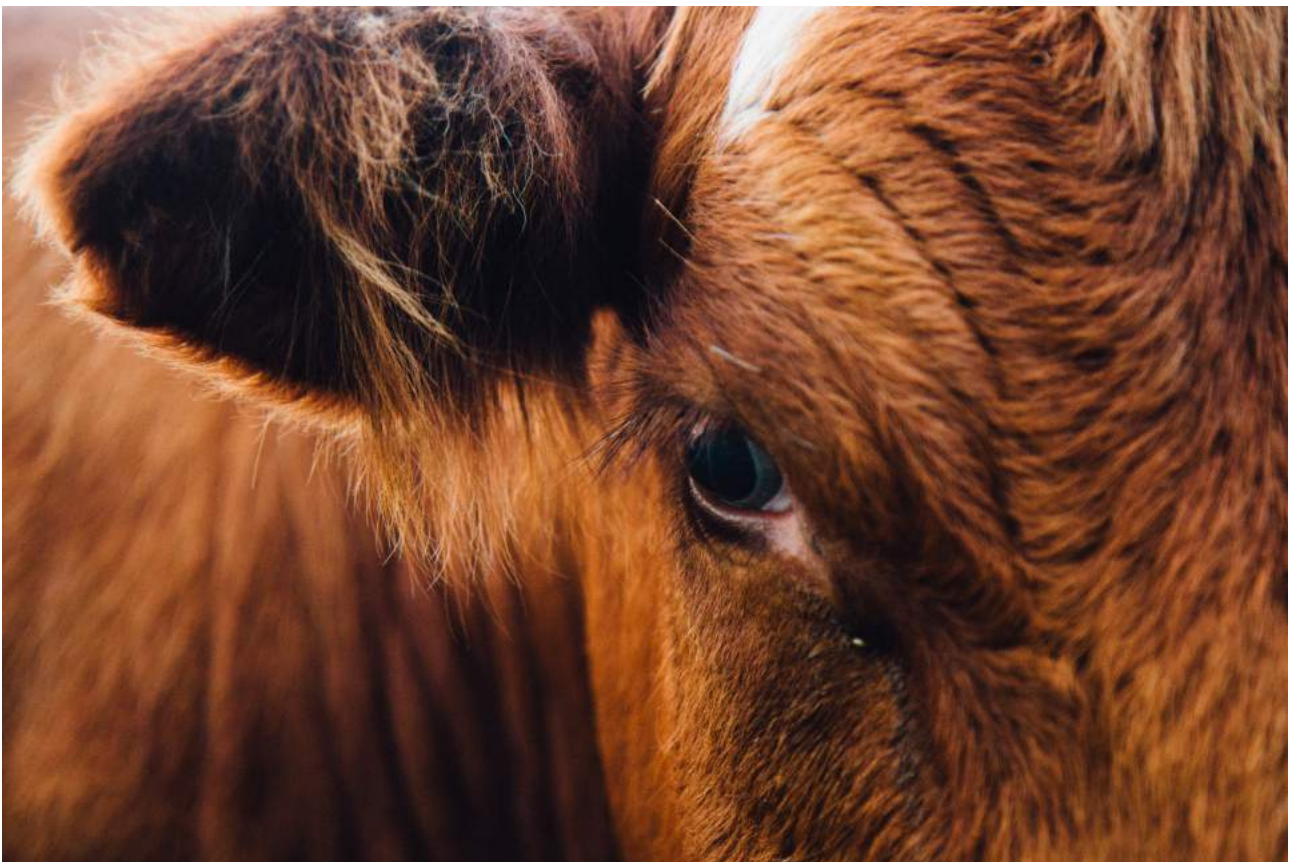
The life that we force on these animals can barely even be called a life - in the eyes of the animals, they are in Hell. They have nothing to feel grateful for. We do the most evil and unimaginably horrific things to these innocent creatures. We treat them as objects that we have dominion over, we inflict unspeakable violence onto them and yet we still have the audacity to say that they should be grateful to us for the life that we give them.

The egg-laying hen kept in a cage should be grateful. The calf murdered for dairy should be grateful. The coyote killed for fur should be grateful. The pig killed in a gas chamber should be grateful. The cow that has a knife against their throat should be grateful. The fish dragged out of the ocean should be grateful. The animals tested on in laboratories should be grateful.

Ask the person who uses this excuse, "do you think you could go to a slaughterhouse look an animal in they eye as they are about to be killed and tell them that they should be thanking you for their life?"

CAN'T WE JUST IMPROVE THE LIVES OF ANIMALS?

Most consumers of animal products state that they care about the wellbeing of animals and even go so far as to agree that the way we raise and kill animals is cruel. This is partly why many people choose to pay extra for free-range eggs and organic animal products. I was the same before I was vegan, I would always buy free-range eggs as I believed that the hens had lived a happy and fulfilled life. In fact, if people tell you that they buy free-range, or choose to buy animal products that are labelled as being high welfare, this can actually be a point that can be used in our favour, as it shows the person does have compassion for animals.



But let's see, does the 'humane', 'high-welfare', 'RSPCA-Assured', 'local', 'organic' excuse morally justify exploiting and killing an animal?

Well, taking an egg-laying hen out of a cage and into an overcrowded barn is about as helpful to the chicken as giving a prisoner a pillow to put his head on whilst he's being waterboarded and labelling him as a 'humanely tortured prisoner'.

Jeffrey Dahmer was a serial killer who drugged his victims before he killed them, so in reality the people he killed weren't aware they were going to die, they didn't suffer and they didn't feel pain (where have we heard those phrases before?) - does that mean he was a humane serial killer? Was he a high-welfare, ethical murderer?

The reality is, it doesn't matter what treatment the animals receive, if they are destined to be killed, exploited or abused in anyway then there is no ethical or humane way in which to use them. The only humane method of slaughter is to not slaughter. The only happy chickens are the chickens that get to live a free life, truly free, not just 'free-range'.

Humane slaughter is an oxymoron and there is no such thing as high welfare murder, or happy exploitation. Now, there is of course the argument that improving the treatment of animals is better than keeping it the way it is. And indeed it would be 'better' for pigs to not spend 6 months of their lives in gestation crates, unable to turn around. But as well as addressing welfare considerations as animal rights advocates, we must also strive to address the end of animal *use* as a whole.

Animal welfare labelling eases the conscience of the consumer, reinforcing the idea that there is an ethical way to exploit an animal and allowing the consumer to buy a product thinking that in doing so they are giving an animal a happy life.

This is why it's so important that we don't perpetuate notions of welfare, because to do so is an injustice to the animals who are still suffering. After all, there is no right way to do the wrong thing.

If someone mentions free-range eggs or something similar, say something along the lines of, "buying free-range eggs shows you care about animals, that's great! I used to do the same - but then I looked into it and unfortunately 'free-range' is just a marketing label, as the chickens are raised in huge barns where the vast majority are denied access to fresh air and sunlight. Not to mention the male chicks are still ground up alive and ultimately all of the hens still end up being slaughtered."

Free-range is a deceitful attempt by the egg industry to lure customers into believing their product is more ethical and morally righteous than caged eggs and in doing so they can charge more money for the product. **High welfare** is a scam to make people think that the animal lived a happy, good life - but it doesn't matter what label is on the product, the animal died in the same slaughterhouse using the same method as all the other animals on the shelves. Ask the person you are talking to about this, say, "are the animals raised on small local farms taken to different slaughterhouses, or are they killed in the same way factory farmed animals are?"

The fact of the matter is, it doesn't matter how nice a life an animal has, the moment we exploit them for what is rightfully theirs and eventually take them to the slaughterhouse or to the yard to kill them, that is abuse. Animals don't want bigger cages or larger barns, they don't care whether or not they're grass-fed, or organic. They don't want to be RSPCA-Assured or Red Tractor Approved, because those labels are there for us, the consumer, to ease our conscience.

All the animals want is to be given the moral consideration that they deserve. They don't want to be free-range, or free to pasture 4 - 6 months of the year. They want to

be free to live their lives in their entirety, without fear of human inflicted pain, suffering or exploitation.

It always strikes me as strange that when people campaign against eating dogs in Yulin, they don't campaign for the animals to be kept in bigger cages, or to be free-range. Nobody ever asks for the dogs to be killed in a more humane way. We demand that the festival be abolished. We would never say that RSPCA-Assured labrador steaks would be acceptable, or Red Tractor approved minced poodle.

The purposefully misleading marketing terminology printed on animal products holds no veracity when compared to the actual treatment of the animal who was exploited, murdered and packaged up neatly for consumers to eat free of any guilt or culpability. I think it's really important to highlight these points to anyone who says we should improve conditions or states that they buy animal products from happy farms, or humane slaughterhouses.

You could always ask the person you are talking to, "can we humanely kill an animal?".

If the person believes there is a humane way to kill an animal, remind them that the word humane means "having or showing compassion or benevolence", so re-phrase the question and ask, "how do we compassionately, benevolently or humanely take the life of an animal that does not want to die for an unnecessary reason?".

So now let's consider improving the welfare of animals from an economic perspective. If humans are treated as a commodity by corporations and big businesses, then how can we plausibly allow ourselves to be tricked into believing that animals will be treated with respect and decency? And as we've already established, if we're using an animal for our own gain, we are by default not treating them with respect and decency.

Corporations are not going to invest their money into significantly improving welfare standards, in fact low welfare standards often mean higher profit margins for these companies. So to increase welfare standards on an exponential scale would mean that the price of animal products would have to rise, and the consumer would have to foot the bill. Most people simply aren't able to have their food bill increase, and many won't when they don't have to. Furthermore, if we did move towards a system of 'idyllic' family farming, with 'grass-fed' 'free-range' animals, it would simply not be environmentally sustainable to meet the world's demand for animal products. There is simply not enough space on the surface of the planet.

What this would also mean is that animal products would only become available for the wealthy, making it a luxury and highly sought after product. This is inherently classist, as it creates a world where the rich are able to buy products that most of society can't - and it takes us back to the days where eating animals was a sign of financial dominance.

So to conclude, even if we did somehow meaningfully improve the standards of welfare for factory farmed animals, whatever kind of paradox that may be, that would still not justify continuing to consume animal products.

MORALITY IS SUBJECTIVE

Before I went vegan I don't think I'd ever heard the phrase "but morality is subjective" when talking about issues of social justice - however now it's something that I hear quite a lot when it comes to animals. If morality truly was subjective then there would be absolutely no need for a judicial system or prisons, there would be no such thing as 'good' or 'bad' as all behaviour would be completely acceptable.



This is really how you can argue against the "morality is subjective" argument, by simply stating that if we truly lived by that philosophy then murder, rape, arson, theft, etc would by default all be completely moral and acceptable. Ask the person you are

talking to, "if you believe morality is subjective, would it therefore be acceptable for someone to murder their partner?".

You could also ask: *"using the morality is subjective argument, is it then acceptable for me to beat and kill a dog?"*.

If you wanted to you could even ask: *"If you believe that morality is subjective then would it be justifiable for someone to murder you?"*.

Unnecessary murder is immoral. Abusing someone is immoral. Causing intentional pain or suffering to anyone for no necessary reason is immoral.

We know these things because within us all exists an understanding of what is right and wrong, we can become blinded by conditioning but all we have to do is put ourselves in the position of the victim to understand why the action of hurting another cannot be morally justified.

What morality really comes down to is the awareness of a victim. What is moral should be defined by whether or not what is being done has a victim that is suffering unnecessarily. I believe issues of morality can be as simple as, "would I want that done to me? And if not, what right do I have to do it to another?".

H. L Mencken stated: "morality is doing what's right regardless of what you're told. Obedience is doing what is told regardless of what is right."

EVERYTHING IN MODERATION

Let's start with the health argument, when people say "everything in moderation" or, "a little bit of cheese or meat is healthy", I normally respond by saying, "if something is bad for you, it's bad for you. It doesn't matter if you consume a lot or a little, it's still bad for you. Now, you could smoke one cigarette a month and it wouldn't give you cancer or kill you, but that cigarette is still bad for you. Likewise, you could eat a slice of bacon once a month and although it wouldn't kill you, it is still inherently bad for you."



You could then go on to say, "the great thing about plants is they don't only contain beneficial nutrients and vitamins, but they don't come with all the incredibly unhealthy aspects of animal products like cholesterol, hormones, antibiotics, etc."

Now let's turn our attention to the ethical implications of this argument. Veganism is the only social justice movement where people try and incorporate the idea of moderation or reducing as a viable solution. The truth is, it doesn't matter how much or how little someone partakes in a system of oppression, there is still a victim who is being impacted.

Although it can be a good place to start, it is not morally justifiable to **only reduce** the amount of animal products that we consume, as even if it is 'only' once a week there is still a victim who is being negatively impacted for an unnecessary reason - this is precisely why moderation or reduction is not an ethical compromise. Claiming that animal products in moderation is ethically responsible validates the idea that using animals is normal and morally admissible.

Let's put this into perspective, the people I've known who use the argument "everything in moderation" normally have a diet that consists of cow's milk on their cereal and in their morning coffee, followed by a ham and cheese sandwich or something along those lines for lunch, and probably another coffee with cow's milk during the day.

For dinner it will be cow flesh, or chicken flesh, or pig flesh, or fish flesh, with vegetables and starches in some form or another. Afterwards it could be a dairy desert, not to mention the snacks, biscuits and chocolate bars that have dairy and eggs in them. This diet resembles anything but moderation, but this is the sort of diet that a huge amount of people in the UK consume on a daily basis.

To bring this discussion back to the ethical side of the moderation argument, animals are still being murdered for an unjustifiable reason. An animal that gets killed in a slaughterhouse isn't grateful because the person that later eats their flesh believes they do so in moderation. The animal is still dead, their life is still over and no amount of moderation or reduction changes that fact.

If you are having a conversation with someone and they try to morally justify eating animal products by saying they do so in moderation, or they say that they have reduced their consumption, ask them why. If they mention that it's for ethical or environmental reasons, then I think it's important to highlight what an excellent first step this is. Try and say something like, "it's great that you have reduced your animal product consumption for ethical reasons, but have you thought about how even though you may not be consuming as much as you used to, you are still paying for animals to be killed?".

I also like asking, "what would stop you taking the step to full vegan?"

CAN'T BE 100% VEGAN

I think of all the excuses used against veganism this is actually a very important one and something that as vegans we need to be aware of. It is absolutely true that it is almost impossible to be 100% vegan in this world - for example the production and harvesting of crops does cause the death of animals like aphids, caterpillars, moths, worms, flies, locusts - and even birds and rodents. Where this argument falls apart is that it is used to suggest that if you can't be 100% vegan there's no point in trying at all, or more to the point, because animals sometimes die in crop production it is therefore acceptable for us to breed, raise and kill animals intentionally.



By this argument a fireman could be outside of a burning building about to go in and save a baby, but then he realises that there's also another person in there that he can't save. So he decides that since he cannot save both, there is no point in saving either of them and leaves the baby to burn to death. Or a coastguard sees a group of drowning children but realises that it won't be possible to save all of them, so he allows them all to drown instead of trying to save any of them.

What this argument really boils down to is intention. When we buy animal products we are intentionally paying for someone to exploit and kill an animal, when we buy plants we are not.

If someone was driving their car and they accidentally hit a dog, that would not be the same as if they purposefully drove after the dog until they ran them over. The logic behind the argument, "it's morally justifiable for me to pay for an animal to be killed because animals sometimes die in crop production" is stating that morally, accidentally hitting the dog is the same as purposefully hitting the dog, as it ignores the intention. It also states that because animals are sometimes killed accidentally by cars, it is therefore acceptable to purposefully run them over.

When talking to someone who uses this excuse, ask them, "morally, is there a difference between accidentally hitting a dog with your car and purposefully hitting a dog with your car?". When they say yes, then ask them, "so by that logic is there morally a difference between an animal accidentally being killed in crop production and an animal purposefully being killed in a slaughterhouse?".

Also, it's important to mention that vastly more plants are used in the production of animal products than they are vegan products, so be sure to say, "if you care about the animals that are killed in crop production you should be vegan because vastly more plants are needed to create animal products, which means vastly more animals are killed in crop production for non-vegans than they are for vegans."

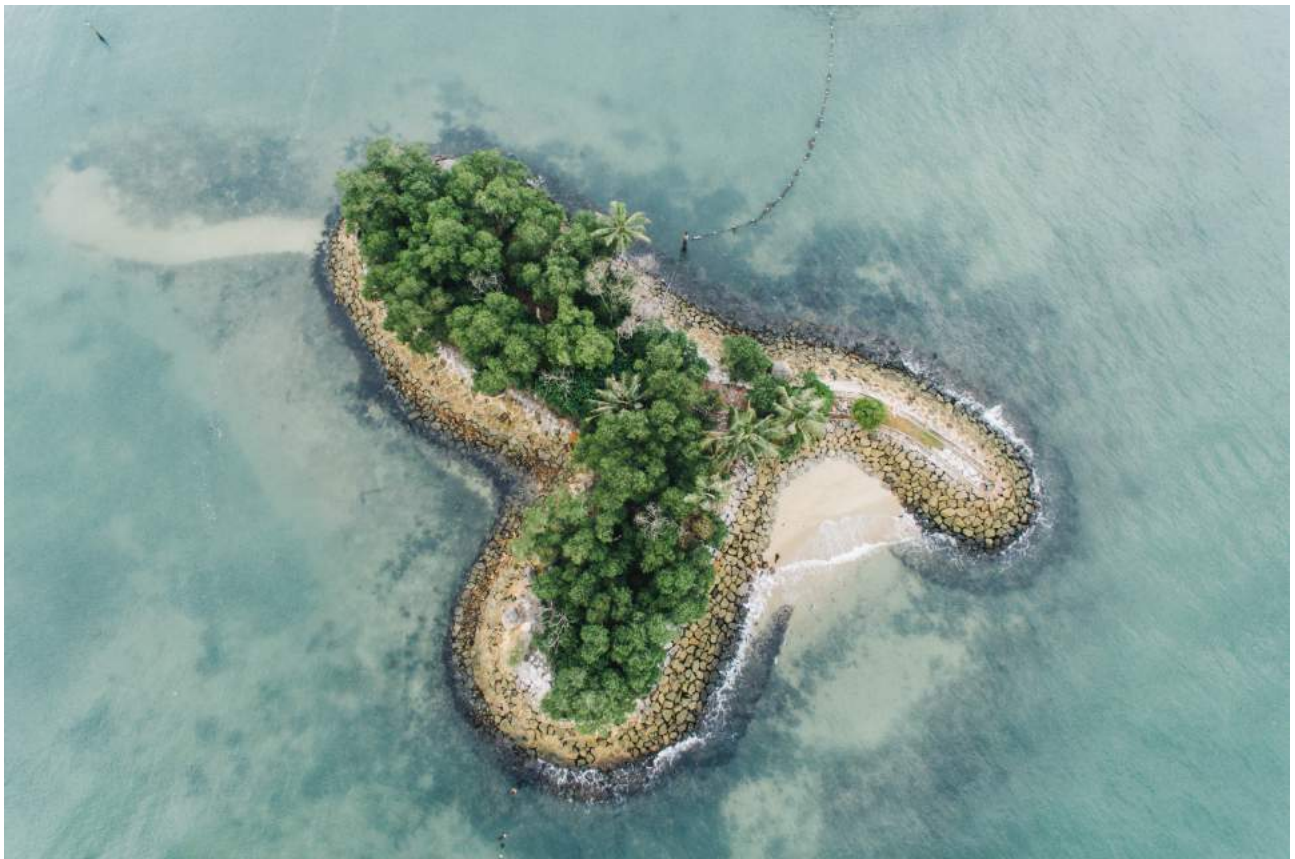
This excuse also misses one of the biggest points of veganism, which is that we don't need to eat animals or their secretions to live, hence why we don't. The reason that insects and small animals die in crop production is not because we all want to eat them, but because we do **need** to eat plants in order to sustain a healthy life.

Ultimately, veganism is about minimising the damage done to animals as much as is possible and practicable, it's not about being perfect. I think people can often try and paint veganism as a pursuit for perfection as it makes it seem completely unobtainable, idealistic and not grounded in reality.

Note: In 2021 I released [this video](#) fully debunking the 'crop deaths' argument.

WHAT IF YOU WERE STRANDED ON A DESERT ISLAND?

The desert island excuse is without doubt a firm favourite for many people, and I hear that due to the booming number of vegans winding up on desert islands there's actually now a really successful falafel and hummus pop up.



The idea of this excuse is that it seeks to create the illusion of hypocrisy in veganism. People that use this excuse want to come to the conclusion that in a life or death situation, even a vegan would value his or her own life above that of an animal's and therefore it is morally justifiable for them to continue consuming animal products.

Obviously, if someone was stranded on a desert island, vegan or not, they would seek to find fruits and vegetables first, and if there were animals roaming around that we could kill, there would also presumably be vegetation that we could eat as well.

Let's be honest, if anyone did just randomly get stranded on a desert island their chance of survival would be incredibly low. Even if there was an animal there, most of us wouldn't know how to kill them, butcher them and cook them - for this reason I would become friends with the animal. At least that way I would have a friendship and someone to spend time with as I slowly died from starvation and lack of clean drinking water.

On a serious note, nobody can really judge what they'd do in a survival situation and there have been documented cases where humans have eaten each other in order to survive. The most important thing here however, is that just because humans have killed and eaten other humans for survival, doesn't mean it is moral for us to kill and eat each other in a normal environment.

This is really the main point of the rebuttal, because even if a vegan killed and ate an animal in a life or death situation, this provides no moral justification for eating animal products in everyday life.

The reality is, we are not stuck on a desert island and therefore we do not need to kill and eat an animal out of necessity. We do however live in a society where we are surrounded by an abundance of vegan foods.

By creating an environment or a situation where every choice or possibility is an unsavoury one, people who use this excuse are trying to find solace for the fact their diet causes unnecessary and unjustifiable suffering to another living being. The desert island excuse is a way of reaffirming the myth that we need to eat animals to survive

by creating an extreme situation with no satisfactory moral choices, and then transposing the conduct that one would find acceptable on a desert island into everyday society.

In essence it comes down to this, none of us are stranded on a desert island so the excuse is redundant and there is no moral correlation between killing an animal out of necessity in a life or death situation and killing an animal for nothing other than sensory pleasure.

ISN'T BEING VEGETARIAN ENOUGH?

When I was a vegetarian I strongly believed that I had stopped supporting the murder of animals in my diet and that I didn't need to go to vegan. In fact, I thought vegans were weird and extreme.



The problem with this excuse is that even though most vegetarians cut out animal flesh for ethical reasons, many are sadly still hugely unaware of the atrocities committed to animals for dairy and eggs and don't know the full extent of the ways that we exploit animals, I know that I certainly wasn't aware.

I became a vegetarian believing that animals shouldn't die for food, but I came to this conclusion without researching anything into the slaughter or treatment of animals. I hadn't watched any slaughterhouse footage and I didn't feel the need to because in my eyes I was no longer contributing to those systems of violence.

I, like many others, was under the illusion that free-range eggs were ethical and that the treatment of dairy cows was humane. I never considered that female cows needed to give birth to produce milk, which really shows the power of the dairy industry and the propaganda that they feed to us. I remember thinking that it really isn't necessary to become a vegan. I was very wrong.

By being a vegetarian we still contribute to the needless torture, abuse and slaughter of animals. Being vegetarian quite simply isn't enough.

In the egg industry male chicks are a useless byproduct and they serve no use to the industry. So as soon as they are hatched they are thrown by the thousands into industrial grinders where they are minced apart, or they are gassed alive. These are new born babies and their first and only experience of life is being killed. Think of the confusion and fear these chicks feel as they are callously thrown onto a conveyor belt and dropped into a grinder, or into a machine designed to gas them to death.

It's so important to emphasise that all male chicks are killed regardless of what system of egg production it is. This happens in caged, free-range and organic facilities.

It's helpful to inform people about the egg industry, as most people simply aren't aware. I've even had people say I was lying, as "that simply would never happen". It truly is deeply upsetting to think about how these industries have conditioned us into purchasing these products, even though doing so means we are paying for practices that go against our innate compassion for animals.

If you're in a conversation with someone try saying something like, "what do you think happens to the male chicks in the egg industry, bear in mind that they are of a different breed to chickens raised for meat, and are not suitable to be reared for their flesh?"

Furthermore, if people bring up free-range eggs, ask them, "do you know what a free range egg farm looks like?"

You could even go so far as to ask, "do you think it's possible that free-range could be a marketing ploy to make you buy a product with an eased conscience?"

Free-range eggs still involve the use and abuse of hens. They frequently have their beaks trimmed, and even though legally they have to have access to the outdoors, many never leave the barn and are unable to access sunlight or fresh air in their entire lives. [This is an investigation](#) into 'The Happy Egg Co' in 2021.

Even in free-range barns, hens, on average, only have an area equivalent to the size of an iPad each. In fact, farmers can legally house 16,000 birds per barn in the UK, which means they can legally house 9 birds per square metre of space.²³

Many hens can't cope with the stress of being genetically modified to produce 300 eggs per year. This in turn leads to them becoming malnourished and sick with diseases such as osteoporosis. It is reported that more than 45% of egg laying hens

²³ <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3489317/And-call-free-range-s-disturbing-images-16-000-free-range-hens-crammed-shed-fact-conditions-approved-RSPCA.html>

break a bone at some point during their lives (<http://www.landofhopeandglory.org/facts>). Cannibalism is also a big problem on egg farms, with ill and dead birds being pecked at by their fellow birds.

After the hens are 'spent' (meaning they can't produce anymore eggs), which normally occurs after 72 weeks, they are thrown into crates and are driven to a slaughterhouse where they are then hung upside down and their throats are slit. Some hens survive this ordeal and are submerged in boiling hot water still alive and are boiled to death.

The dairy industry is equally disgusting. Like male chicks, newborn male calves are useless to dairy farmers and so they are taken away from their mothers normally within 24 - 72 hours of birth, some are shot, killed and discarded immediately. The ones that are not shot will either be raised for veal, or they'll be sold into the beef industry and raised for their flesh.

The male calves that are slaughtered for veal are hung upside down and have their throats slit when they are still babies. The veal industry would not exist if it wasn't for the dairy industry.

Furthermore, like humans, cows only produce milk when they have given birth. This means that cows are forcibly impregnated using a process called artificial insemination. If the calf is female she will also be taken from her mother shortly after being born. When people mention dairy I always like to ask, "why do you think a cow produces milk?" - as so many people I speak to simply don't know why. I certainly didn't.

You can also ask people, ***"what do you think happens to the calves if we're drinking their mother's milk?"***

Or, *“what do you think happens to the male calves in the dairy industry as they don’t produce any milk?”*

Dairy cows have also been selectively bred to produce up to 10 times more milk than they would naturally. This overuse of their udders leads to painful infections such as mastitis, which can also cause pus and blood to be filtered into the milk that humans then drink.

When they become too weak, or are unable to have anymore children or produce anymore milk, they are taken to the slaughterhouse where their throats are slit and they are left to bleed to death so that their flesh can be used for cheap meat products.

Trapped in a hellish cycle of forced impregnation and forced lactation, repeatedly abused and exploited by the farmers, dairy cows, who in nature can live up to 25 years, are killed normally after only 4 - 5.

For me this is one of the easiest ways to convince an ethical vegetarian, just simply explain to them that all the animals in the egg and dairy industries end up in the slaughterhouse. You can also explain the suffering animals endure in the clothing, entertainment and cosmetic industries, as vegetarians often support these systems too (I was a vegetarian that wore leather and went to the zoo).

With dairy I always like to ask things along the lines of, “don’t you think it’s strange that we drink the milk from another species of animal, whose milk is actually meant for their babies and not for us?”.

Or, *“would you ever suckle on the udders of a cow yourself?”*

Or, *“would you ever drink pig milk, or rat milk?”*

Now as we can see, being vegetarian still contributes massively to the suffering of animals, but many vegetarians are simply not aware of this. I think any conversation with a vegetarian is a great opportunity for spreading veganism and having a positive and productive conversation.

HITLER WAS A VEGETARIAN / I ONCE KNEW A VEGAN WHO WASN'T VERY NICE

Of all the excuses that meat eaters use to invalidate veganism, this one is possibly the most unusual. I've grouped the 'but Hitler was a vegetarian' excuse with the, 'I once knew a vegan who wasn't very nice' because they both revolve around dismissing an entire movement and philosophy of life based on the actions of an individual.



First and foremost, Hitler wasn't a vegetarian. I believe some of these ideas came about because Goebbels wanted to make Hitler seem likeable by creating comparisons between him and Gandhi, who was a vegetarian. But that fact is neither here nor there when addressing the question because even if Hitler was a vegetarian, what exactly would that prove?

The idea behind this argument is that because one of the most evil men in history, who committed vile atrocities, cared about animals, then by being vegan you too will probably undervalue humans as a consequence of your views towards animals.

Quite obviously this excuse is beyond absurd. Chairman Mao, Mussolini and Stalin all ate meat and committed unforgivable crimes. So by the logic of the 'but Hitler argument', vegans could say, "you better become vegan because Stalin ate animals and if you eat animals you'll be just like Stalin".

If you are ever in a situation where someone actually uses this argument genuinely, I would suggest that you say "actually Hitler wasn't a vegetarian, but even if he was, how does that morally justify us eating animals and their secretions?". You could also remind them that you are vegan, not vegetarian.

I think another reason people make this statement is to imply vegans are fascist. If you think about it, fascists believe that they are superior to others based on entirely superfluous notions of heritage, ethnicity, sexuality, etc. Likewise, people eat animals for entirely superfluous notions as well. Now, obviously people who aren't vegan are not fascists by default, but if there are comparisons being made between ideologies, slaughtering trillions of animals for an entirely unnecessary reason is much more in line with fascism than eating plants and advocating for all animals to be treated with respect and compassion.

Needless to say, I would not recommend insinuating that the person you are talking to is in anyway a fascist!

But nonetheless, the Hitler excuse seeks to set up an association between not eating animals and being evil, which can be a dangerous comparison to draw if someone was to believe that Hitler was actually a vegetarian.

Thankfully to most people this it is quite clearly a ridiculous argument, as it could be just as easily argued by this logic that because Hitler brushed his teeth or used a car anyone who does either of those things is by default just like Hitler.

I think the real issue with this excuse is that it attempts to demonise the vegan movement by associating it with the complete opposite of what it really stands for, and for this reason I find this excuse more than just the outlandish argument it first seems.

So let's take this excuse and focus on the next element of it, which is, "but I once knew a vegan who wasn't very nice to me". This argument follows the same idea that because someone who was vegan wasn't very nice, they therefore invalidate the entire philosophy of veganism.

Now for obvious reasons this logic is very flawed. The reality is, we have all had bad experiences with people at some point in our life, but to then believe that you can judge on an entire demographic of people, or philosophy based on that one experience is obviously not logical in the slightest.

WHAT ABOUT FARMER'S JOBS?

So this is actually a very important argument, and one that I imagine will be used more frequently as the vegan movement progresses. When someone brings up the issue of farmers' livelihoods I normally say something like, "you're absolutely right, we do need to consider the livelihoods of farmers, who are often born into the farming community and have never known anything different in their lives and have never questioned the morality of what they do."



Most people see farming as an idyllic, traditional job, and we're fed an idea of good, honest farmers struggling to make enough money to survive. Now while this may not be strictly true, we should acknowledge farmers' livelihoods.

The issue with farmers is that they are the ones directly enslaving, mutilating and profiting off the exploitation and death of animals and as such, it can be hard for us to want to address the issue of their livelihoods because the most important thing for us is to end the exploitation of animals as quickly as we possibly can.

What we have to be considerate of though, is that these farmers are doing a job that they are being asked to do - they are fulfilling the wishes of the consumer. Now, undeniably there are truly evil farmers who deserve no sympathy or consideration, and I've spoken to other farmers who agree with this. The issue is most farmers are doing what they are told to do and operate under what is deemed legal, many were also born into farming families and consequently have been conditioned and indoctrinated into a certain way of life and genuinely believe that farming animals is completely ethical and moral.

So as vegans we are left with a moral dilemma because we all readily acknowledge that the reason good people perpetuate systems of violence towards animals is because they have been conditioned to do so, but this same logic applies to farmers as well, who have also been conditioned into these same systems of violence.

What this fundamentally means, is that farmers need to be given some form of consideration that shows they're not entirely morally culpable for the life that they have been given and I think an awareness of the fact their jobs are at risk fulfils this need.

So this leads us on to the discussion of what do we do about farmers' jobs?

Firstly and most simply, many farmers can switch to arable farming and produce only plants. This is an entirely plausible solution for some farmers and in fact it has already been done by a number of farmers, including a cattle farmer who gave all of his herd to Hillside Animal Sanctuary - and he now runs a fully vegan farm.

The Vegan Society and the organisation Refarm'd offer help and financial support to any farmers who want to make the transition, so that's always a really good thing to tell the person that you are talking to. Another way of supplying funds to farmers looking to make the transition is through tax subsidies. For me this is probably the most important thing that needs to happen to safeguard farmers' livelihoods.

Currently a proportion of our tax money is given to farmers to help financially support what they do, the issue is though, the majority of the subsidies go straight to animal farming, which is one of the reasons why animal products remain affordable. If the subsidies were removed it would cause huge problems to those industries.

If the subsidies that are given to animal farming were instead put into plant farming, this would drive the price of animal products up, making them less accessible and less affordable and bring the price of plants down, making them more accessible and more affordable. It would also mean that these subsidies could be used to help and financially support animal farmers transition over to plant farming instead.

However, there will be farmers who can't switch to producing plants as their land won't be suitable for arable farming. This inherently means that they will probably end up losing their job as a farmer, but it was always going to be inevitable that this will happen for some farmers.

So in order to help these farmers, the subsidies could also be used to allow them to become publicly funded land managers. In other words, instead of farming they are subsidised to let their land re-wild and regrow. This would also allow us to reforest the land that has been previously deforested and create carbon sinks (areas of land that absorb carbon from the atmosphere).

However, it is also important to mention that a job or a livelihood does not provide moral justification for enslaving, mutilating and profiting off the death of animals, and in this situation the hardships of a farmer finding a new job, or changing how they live off the land, is nothing compared to the life of suffering and fear that animals have to endure in the farming industries.

What also strikes me as disingenuous, is for the most part people don't ever normally care about whether or not their actions are jeopardising the jobs of others. For example, if we use the self-checkout machines in supermarkets we are jeopardising the jobs of the cashiers as their job becomes redundant.

Another example that you could say to someone is, "would you advocate for everyone to smoke cigarettes because if nobody smoked all the tobacco farmers and people employed within the cigarette industries would lose their jobs and their livelihoods?"

If they say no, you could follow up with, "do you think the job of an animal farmer is more important than the job of a plant farmer?"

Furthermore, not everybody is going to stop eating animal products overnight, the shift will be gradual, which means farmers wouldn't lose their jobs immediately and this would instead provide the perfect opportunity for them to transition into a different form of land management.

Also, when it comes to livelihoods and jobs, it's only ever farmers that are mentioned. Nobody ever expresses concern for the jobs of slaughterhouse workers. In fact sometimes people say to me, "how could anyone ever do a job like that?", or "you have to be a sick person to work in a slaughterhouse!" - however people who work in slaughterhouses generally do so out of necessity, not because they want to - and the only reason those jobs exist is because consumers buy animal products.

Slaughterhouse workers are often immigrants or impoverished, with little to no other options. They suffer from some of the highest rates of PTSD, depression, anxiety, suicide and drug and alcohol abuse in any profession and suffer huge psychological issues as a result of killing animals. Abolishing animal agriculture would be beneficial for these people as well as for the animals.

2021 update: I have a full pack to help farmers transition [available to download here](#).

IT'S THE CIRCLE OF LIFE

This excuse is similar to the food chain argument in the sense that it operates under the belief that our consumption of animals is morally justified because it is part of a natural order and as such, we are merely fulfilling our responsibility as a species within the animal kingdom.



Claiming that eating animals is the circle of life is a contradiction because animal agriculture is the circle of continuous unnecessary torture and death. Life is the exact opposite of what the animal agriculture industry is.

The only two moments of life that are certain are our birth and our death and this is really all the circle of life actually refers to, everything that is born must indeed come full circle and die as well. What happens between these two events is variable and has nothing to do with a preordained circle of life.

The concept of the circle of life is used by people often trying to assert that humans are entitled to kill animals because of a pre-ordained natural order that is out of our control. They are essentially arguing that just because everything that lives must die, it therefore means we are morally justified to intentionally take life.

This would theoretically mean then that we are justified to take any life that we want, in any manner that we choose because after all, it is the circle of life. I could needlessly murder a dog, I could needlessly murder a cat, or indeed, I could needlessly murder any animal for that matter. Using the logic behind the circle of life argument you would be morally excused for murdering a human as well.

If someone you are talking to brings up the circle of life argument ask them, "by the logic that we are morally justified to slaughter animals because all life dies anyway, would it therefore be acceptable for me to cut the throat of a dog?"

It's also interesting how the circle of life argument only applies to us killing non-human animals, it doesn't also transpose to when humans kill other humans, or indeed to when non-human animals kill humans. When we hear about a shark or a crocodile killing a human we don't sit back and say, "oh well, it's the circle of life, what is born must one day die!" No, we get angry and we send hunters or fishermen to try and kill the animal in an act of vengeance and because we fear that animal may go on to kill more people.

If a human murders another human, we arrest them, punish them and send them to jail. However, if we are to subscribe to the logic of this excuse then murder would not

be a crime or a punishable offence because death is inevitable and for that very reason it is acceptable to take the life of anyone we wish.

If the needless murder of animals is justifiable because of the circle of life, then that means the needless murder of any animal is justifiable, not just the ones we conveniently want this logic to apply to.

Furthermore, if the basis of the argument is grounded in what is perceived to be natural then that still provides no justification for how we raise, farm, exploit and kill animals, as the systems that we have created couldn't be further detached from nature.

How can forcibly impregnating cows so that we can drink the milk that was designed to feed their children be natural? It defies nature. How can raising animals in cages and then gassing them or anally electrocuting them so we can wear their skin be considered natural? How can putting cosmetics and toiletries into the eyes of animals and burning their skin with corrosive substances be morally justified through the idea of the circle of life?

All of these things defy any notion of the circle of life, because the circle of life claims that what we are doing is intrinsically linked to nature but in reality, what we do couldn't be further removed from the natural world.

If we add to this the fact that many of our leading killers²⁴ can be prevented by avoiding animal products, it becomes apparent that it's not only the circle of death for animals, but for us as well.

²⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=30gEiweaAVQ>).

ANIMALS ARE BRED FOR A PURPOSE

In our society we have granted ourselves the right to decide what purpose other living beings have. I think this perfectly demonstrates just how much we have devalued the lives of non-human animals. We believe that they exist for the purpose that we impose on them.



The truth is, just because we have decided what will happen to an animal doesn't mean what will happen to them is morally justifiable. Many people breed dogs into existence with the sole purpose of raising them for dog fighting, does that mean that dog fighting is moral because those animals were bred for that purpose?

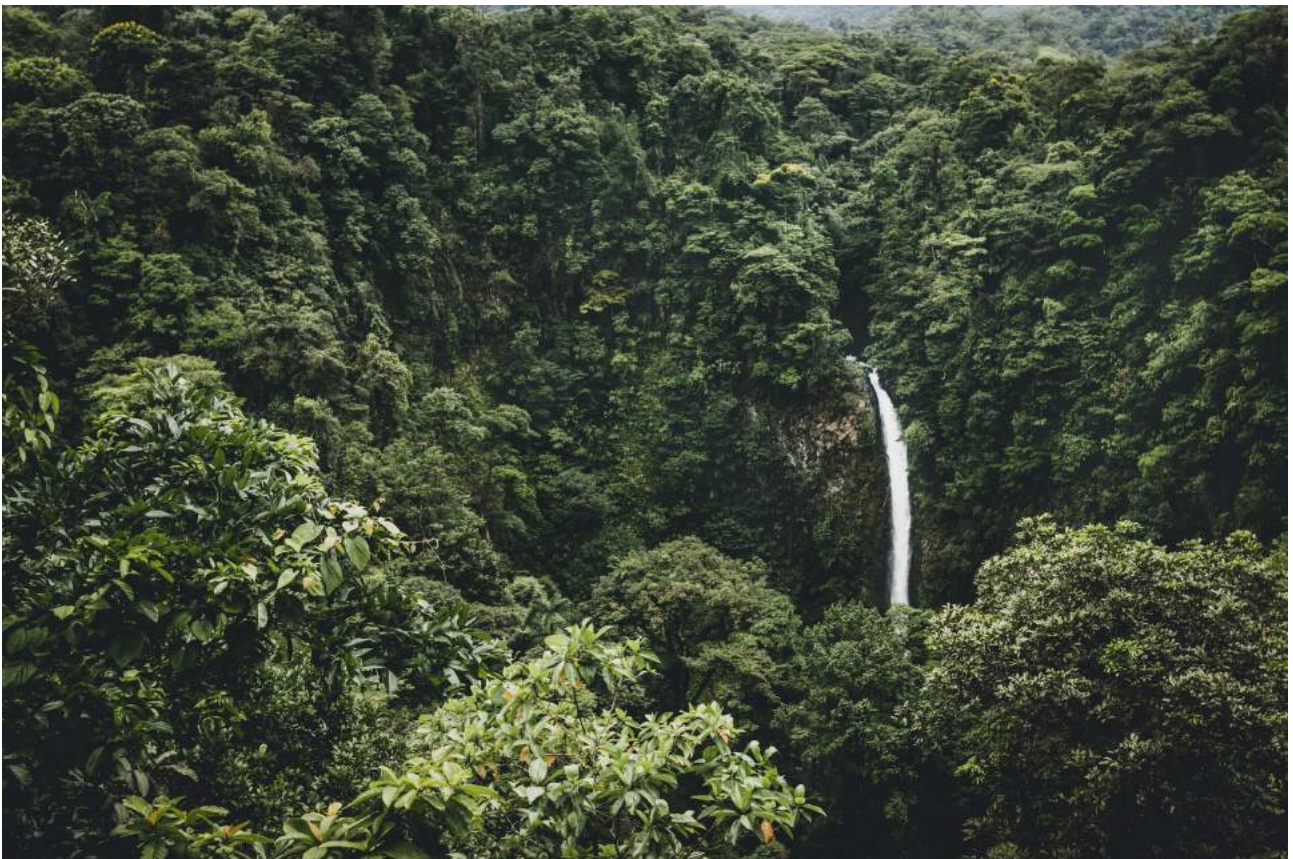
In some countries it is legal to have sex with animals and there are even animal brothels. Using the 'bred for a purpose' excuse it must therefore be perfectly moral to have sex with an animal in a brothel as those animals are bred with that purpose in mind.

This argument also completely avoids the fact that the animals who we exploit have a preference to live their life and wish to avoid feeling pain and fear. In their eyes they have no awareness of the reason they were bred and their desire to live is exactly the same as an animal that was born without a 'purpose' for humans.

If you are having a conversation with someone and they use this excuse, ask them, "is dog fighting therefore moral if the dogs were bred with the purpose to fight?".

SOY FARMING IS DESTROYING THE ENVIRONMENT

I haven't talked that much about the environmental aspects of veganism, although it is important to note that plant-based diets are consistently shown to be the most environmentally sustainable diets.²⁵ In fact, the United Nations stated not so long ago that to avoid the worst effects of climate change, everybody needs to shift to a plant-based diet²⁶.



²⁵ <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/360/6392/987.full>

²⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2010/jun/02/un-report-meat-free-diet>

However, one environmental argument that many people often cite is that soy farming has environmental consequences such as rainforest destruction and habitat loss.

Now undeniably the environmental impact and destruction caused by soy farming is concerning, but we need only consider that 75% of the soy that is grown is fed to livestock animals²⁷ - and some estimates place that figure as being even higher. This pretty much dispatches the argument immediately as we can sustainably produce enough soy for human consumption - the issue surrounding soy farming is that such vast quantities are produced to feed livestock animals - this is why it's bad for the environment, not because vegans consume soy milk.

If someone brings up the soy argument say, "you're right, soy farming is destructive for the environment, but did you know that over 75% of the soy grown is fed to livestock animals? It's because of animal agriculture that soy is currently so destructive."

You could also go on to say, "as you are worried about the environmental impact of soy farming, do you think you will stop eating animal products now that you know they are the main reason for the destructive elements of soy farming?"

I think another important thing to mention is that the soy that is used in foods for humans isn't just used in vegan favourites such as tofu. It's found in cereals, processed foods, breads, sauces, mayonnaise, animal flesh products, chocolate and sweets, among others. Basically soy is used in non-vegan foods and foods that aren't just consumed by vegans.

So it's pretty obvious that if people are really concerned about the environmental destruction caused by soy farming then it would be hypocritical of them if they don't

²⁷ <https://www.tabledebates.org/building-blocks/soy-food-feed-and-land-use-change>

become vegan. If we care about the environment then we have to be a vegan, it's really that simple.

When talking to an environmentalist it's so important to emphasise this information to them, as most environmentalists still aren't vegan - but why? I think one of the main reasons is because people expect governments and corporations to be the ones leading the change when it comes to the environment. It can become incredibly easy to point the finger at businesses that exploit the environment and blame them for all the issues we are currently facing, rather than looking at our own actions and assessing whether or not we are doing everything we can as individuals.

I think when we talk to non-vegan environmentalists, we need work to empower them by expressing that as individuals we have the power to make a huge difference, and we can't expect politicians and CEOs to implement real change, especially if we're refusing to look at our own actions with a critical eye.

IT'S EXTREME, EXPENSIVE, DIFFICULT & RESTRICTIVE TO BE VEGAN

Plus, why do vegans even eat meat substitutes?

Vegan diets have become somewhat synonymous with the idea of restrictive eating, people view vegan food as limiting and there is also a misconception that vegan diets are expensive and elitist. Let's start with the idea that veganism is a restrictive diet.

Since becoming vegan I eat a much larger and more varied range of foods than I ever did before, and I cook with ingredients I'd never heard of. Becoming vegan encouraged me to broaden what I eat and if anything I now view being non-vegan as restrictive. You can also point out to the person you are talking to that you still eat the same meals that you used to. You still have pizza, spaghetti bolognese, mac and cheese, curries, nachos, burritos, etc - and you can veganise pretty much any non-vegan meal. You can still eat the same foods that you used to, the only difference being they are now made from plants.

So a vegan diet is anything but limiting and for that matter it is anything but extreme. This word extreme is often used to describe vegans but the irony is for the first time my lifestyle is the opposite of extreme.

No longer does my food come from animals that screamed in pain as they were murdered. No longer am I eating foods that are the result of torturing animals. Those things sound extreme. Not fruits, vegetables, seeds, grains, legumes, nuts, potatoes, etc. How can a vegan diet be the extreme diet, when it consists of eating foods that can prevent disease, that can increase the longevity of our lives and that reduce animal suffering whilst helping us to live more harmoniously with the environment?

A non-vegan diet is made up of products that come from buildings called slaughterhouses and are made from animals that were mutilated and butchered. Now that sounds extreme.

So, how about “but vegan food is expensive and elitist”.

A vegan diet doesn't mean you have to be eating expensive organic fruits or going to juice bars. If you go into any supermarket, the most expensive foods tend to be the meat and cheese and the cheapest foods are the beans, rice, potatoes, pasta, lentils, etc. Since going vegan I actually spend less money on food than I used to.

The only time where vegan food can be more expensive is when buying the substitutes, for example, frozen vegan 'chicken' nuggets are still more expensive than non-vegan chicken nuggets, but this is to do with supply and demand. As more people go vegan and buy those products, the cheaper they will become. This has already begun happening in UK supermarkets.

Plus, when I used to handle flesh, I would hate it, it was slimy, smelly and I'd have to wash my hands and surfaces afterwards. Now when I handle fruits and vegetables I love it, they're so colourful and vibrant, all you do is give them a rinse and they're good to go -I don't have to scrub my hands clean once I've chopped them. Now that I'm vegan I look forward to cooking, I used to view it as a chore but now it's one of my favourite parts of the day.

This brings us to the final point, as vegans we always get asked about why we eat animal product substitutes if we don't want to eat animal products. As much as I hate the thought of eating animal products now and it makes me feel sick and very uncomfortable, I, like most vegans, didn't become vegan because I disliked the taste of animal products.

Before I became vegan I loved KFC and cow burgers, I loved halloumi and Domino's pizzas - but like many vegans, I realised that there are more important things than my sensory pleasure. As a species we have to understand that justifying our actions by the fact that we find enjoyment in them is not acceptable if it negatively impacts the lives of others.

Vegans eat animal product substitutes because we enjoy the texture and the flavour - and it's even better because no animal had to die or be exploited for our enjoyment of them.

WE'RE OMNIVORES WITH CANINE TEETH

This is without question an excuse that is used a lot to justify exploiting animals. Interestingly, the way that I approach this excuse has actually changed a lot from when I first started advocating for veganism.



Sometimes people argue that our bodies are best equipped to just eat plants - and this was the argument that I would always make when discussing the omnivore excuse. The problem I found though, was that the conversation would often lose focus and become only about whether or not we are omnivores, rather than whether or not it is morally justifiable to kill animals.

I think often when people hear vegans say that we aren't necessarily designed to eat meat, it makes them think that we are deluded and ignoring basic biology and then they struggle to see the arguments that we make as being credible. The reality is, it is completely irrelevant if we are natural omnivores or not, it provides no moral justification for us to exploit animals, as just because we can do something, does not mean that it is ethical for us to do it.

Furthermore, we know that we are able to obtain energy and nutrients from plants and as such, we are able to sustain life from plants alone. Consequently, that means that there is no necessity for us to eat animals and because there is no necessity it cannot be morally justified.

Ask the person, *"even if we are biologically omnivores, we know that we can survive only on plants, how do we then morally justify taking the life of an animal if we know that it is unnecessary?"*

The canine argument is definitely one of the most amusing justifications that people try and use but before I was a vegan I remember using the canine argument myself - and truly believing that my canines made it acceptable for me to pay for someone else to kill an animal on my behalf.

The quickest and easiest way of debunking this argument is to point out that a hippopotamus has the largest canines of any land animal and they are herbivorous. Other plant-eaters with sizeable canine teeth include the gorilla, the saber-toothed deer and camels. Our canines are not capable of tearing raw flesh or killing animals and instead are there so that we can bite into hard, crunchy plants (like apples!).

If someone you are talking to brings up the canine teeth argument, ask them, "hippos actually have the largest canine teeth of any land animal and they are herbivorous,

do you truly think that canines grant us the right to pay someone else to kill an animal on our behalf?”.

Also, just because we possess a physical ability that allows us to do something doesn't make that action moral. So just because we can physically put animal products in our mouth and digest them does not therefore mean that it is an ethical thing to do. For example I can physically clench my fist but that doesn't mean that I am morally justified to then punch someone.

Ask the person using this excuse, *“do you think that because we possess a physical attribute that allows us to do something, we are therefore morally justified to do it?”*.

If they say yes you could then ask, *“I can physically clench my fist, does that mean that I am morally justified to then punch someone?”*.

I think it's also important to look at and know why there is an argument that we are not natural omnivores because it does sometimes come up and it is important to know.

The most important points that crop up are that our teeth are flat and blunt and are capable of moving side to side, as natural herbivores are. Our stomachs have weak hydrochloric acid in them, compared to natural meat eaters who have strong hydrochloric acid and our intestines are the same length and shape as a herbivores.²⁸

That's not to say that we can't eat meat, we of course we can. However, many herbivores can eat meat, such as hippos, who are herbivorous but have been documented opportunistically eating carrion. Humans could well be opportunistic

²⁸ <https://medium.com/four-pursuits-ventures/human-have-evolved-to-eat-plants-6f492d78f605>

omnivores as well, meaning that we thrive on plants but have the ability to consume and digest flesh as well. This would seem to fit with the diets of early humans as well, who would often eat the remains of animals that had been killed predators.

Also, if we were biologically driven animal killers we would be able to kill animals with ease, but the reality is, if we were given a pig that we had to kill using only our hands and teeth, at best we'd probably give the pig a tickle. Not to mention that very few of us would actually want to kill the animal in the first place, let alone have an innate drive to do so. But let's say we did manage to kill the pig, how would we then butcher the pig and eat them? With our canines?

What about the organs, like the intestines and brains, the cartilage, the tendons and ligaments? As a natural animal eater we wouldn't be picky about the bits of the animal that we ate, the whole animal would look appetising to us. Yet how often do we see stories in the newspaper of the shocking revelation that a piece of brain was found in a KFC bucket? It's like for that split second the illusion that meat doesn't come from a living, breathing, feeling animal is shattered and people are forced to confront the abject reality of where their food comes from.

True animal eaters don't find the body parts of the animals they are eating abject, they see the body parts as food - and aren't repulsed by the gore. We actively avoid watching slaughterhouse footage because it's upsetting and even puts us off eating animals.

Let's consider this, if you were locked in a room with a live chicken and an apple you would always eat the apple first. Because when we see a living being we don't feel hungry, we don't want to ravage animals and tear them apart - but when we see an apple we do feel hungry.

GOD SAYS THAT WE CAN EAT ANIMALS

In my experience religion is one of the hardest excuses to argue against because people believe they have been told by a God that they are allowed to eat animals. This unfortunately means it can be incredibly hard to convince someone who is religious because in their eyes they are merely following what they believe they have been given permission to do. When we discuss veganism with someone who is religious I think we have to be cautious to keep the argument focussed and not make it about the religion itself, but instead about how the person's religion doesn't justify them killing animals.



First and foremost, in no religious doctrine does a God say that we have to eat animals, he says we *can* if we need to but not that we *have* to. This means that religion still doesn't provide a necessity for us to exploit animals and as such it still remains unnecessary and therefore impossible to morally justify.

A question I like to ask people who mention religion is, "if we don't have to kill God's creatures - do you not think a kind, compassionate, benevolent God would rather that we didn't?"

I will often say, "when Jesus was alive there was not the abundance of foods that we have now and it is plausible that Jesus would have had to eat animals to survive. However, we have progressed so much as a society that there is no longer a necessity, so do you not think that in the eyes of an all loving God, he would prefer it if we didn't kill his creatures if we don't have to to survive?"

Using a religious belief to justify killing animals is exactly the same as using a religious belief to oppress LGBTQ+ communities. In fact, if the logic, "my religion says I can eat animals" makes eating animals moral, then by default the argument "my religion says it's okay to treat those of a different sexual orientation as less than me" must also make oppressing LGBTQ+ communities moral. But of course, this isn't acceptable at all.

I personally don't think God would be happy with what we are doing to his creatures and the planet that he made for us. Could you imagine if you had a piece of wood and you thought, "you know what, I'm going to make my friend a lovely table out of this, they would really like that." For the sake of argument let's pretend that you spent 6 days making this table for your friend, and on the 6th day you looked at all you had made and it was perfect.

So you give your friend the table and they claim to be so appreciative, they even say, "thank you so much, you have given me this table and I will forever be grateful to you!" But then, right in front of your eyes, they take a sledgehammer and start destroying it. Would you be happy about that? Essentially this is what we are doing to God with the Earth.

We claim to be incredibly grateful for the planet and all of the life that he has created, yet we are destroying everything he made for us right in front of him. He created non-human animals and we say thank you to him by driving them to extinction and killing them by the trillions. We have even genetically modified his creatures, in essence playing God ourselves, because the creatures he created for us weren't suitable for what we wanted from them. Furthermore, we go against God's wishes by taking the milk from mothers that he designed specifically for their children.

In what reality would a God be happy that we forcibly impregnate his creatures and take their babies away from them just so that we can take something that he didn't design for us in the first place? In what reality do we think that a God would be happy about us murdering his creatures when it serves absolutely no necessity? How can a God be pleased with us destroying the beautiful rainforests that he spent time creating, just so we can produce more cattle that we then needlessly slaughter?

Why would a God create such an intricate marine eco-system, where each species of fish is able to live amongst such a vast and extraordinary environment, but then be happy to watch us destroy it right in front of him? In 50 years we have decimated shark, dolphin and whale populations and in the past 40 years we have wiped out 50% of all wildlife on this planet.²⁹

Now one of the main issues with using religion as a justification for anything really, is that religious texts are often very ambiguous and of course open to interpretation, this is partly the reason why some Christians believe it is a sin to be gay, whereas others don't. This same ambiguity can also be seen when turning to the Bible for moral guidance on whether or not we should eat animal products.

²⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2014/sep/29/earth-lost-50-wildlife-in-40-years-wwf>

One of the main passages that people use from the Bible to justify eating animals is “every moving thing that is alive shall be food for you; I give all to you, as I gave the green planet.” But this is often taken out of context as the passage goes on to read “only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood”.

Furthermore, in Genesis, the Bible states: “And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.”

Amos 6:4-7 states: “Woe to those who stretch themselves upon their couches and eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall. They shall be the first to be exiled.”

Furthermore, Ecclesiastes 3:19 states: “For what happens to people also happens to animals—a single event happens to them: just as someone dies, so does the other. In fact, they all breathe the same way, so that a human being has no superiority over an animal.”

There are a multitude of passages from the Bible and indeed in the teachings of all the mainstream religions that further reinforce the idea that no religion mandates the consumption or exploitation of animals.

Sometimes one of the simplest questions to ask someone who is using religion as an argument is, “do slaughterhouses look like the work of Jesus or the Devil?”.

Hell is described as a place of eternal suffering, torment and pain and yet all you have to do is watch slaughterhouse footage to see that they too are places of eternal suffering, torment and pain. For the animals, a slaughterhouse is Hell and no benevolent God or prophet could ever condone what happens inside them.

A question that I often ask to Christians is, "if Jesus and the Devil were locked in a room with a baby lamb, which one would kill the lamb?"

MY FRIENDS AND FAMILY WON'T LIKE IT IF I GO VEGAN

First of all let's address the friends part of this excuse. At no point should friends stop anyone from following their morals and becoming vegan.



However, it is important to also note that peer pressure is an incredibly difficult thing to deal with, especially when someone is being mocked or laughed at. What's so important to realise though, is nobody should ever let the opinions of others stop them from following what they know to be right. I think what makes the friends situation particularly hard is that so many social interactions either revolve around food or at

least involve food and as such, people don't want to isolate themselves from their friends by avoiding situations that involve food.

Fortunately, this situation is getting easier all the time as more and more places are introducing vegan options and vegan menus, and the concept of veganism is becoming increasingly normalised. There is also a huge community of vegans both online and offline and if you, or if someone you're talking to is struggling with their non-vegan friends, or wants to go vegan but is worried about their friends, encourage them to join online vegan groups or to go to vegan meet ups where they can meet likeminded people. It's important to create healthy boundaries with non-vegan friends if you feel they are projecting negativity onto you. Often people can find it very confronting when someone in their life goes vegan, as they are suddenly faced with questions around the morality of their own purchases. Sadly, this can sometimes bring out unpleasant responses in people, such as teasing or belittling. Sometimes it's helpful to simply say "I'll discuss this with you another time when it's not so heated." Or, "why do you think my veganism brings up this reaction?" This is easier said than done, of course.

So let's now turn our attention to the family aspect of this excuse. If I had wanted to become a vegan when I still lived at home with my parents it would have been an incredibly difficult time for me to do so. My family, as much as they have no objections to me being vegan apart from the stereotypical worries about my health, have not amused the idea of becoming vegans themselves for many of the reasons this e-book has covered.

In regards to people being concerned about their family members questioning their veganism or mocking their ethical choices, I can very much understand how this can be extremely difficult.

If you, or someone you're talking to about this issue, doesn't live at home anymore, then of course their family questioning their desire to become vegan shouldn't stop them from becoming vegan. However, if the person still lives at home it can make going vegan a lot more difficult than it would be otherwise.

Try and encourage family members to look at why it is that you want to go vegan, perhaps ask them if they can watch a documentary with you, or some YouTube videos. You could cook for your family in order to show them that vegan food is delicious, affordable, accessible and healthy.

I think a lot of the time parents and family just don't understand veganism or why someone would want to go vegan, so it's important to try and provide an opportunity for them to learn all about it. I think with family, it's sometimes hard for parents especially to hear that their child wants to go vegan for ethical reasons. In a way, you're inadvertently telling your parents that they raised you in an immoral way by feeding you animal products, and that can be quite difficult to process.

Sadly, talking to family about veganism can be the most challenging of all vegan conversations, so it's also important to talk to other people about veganism as well. Many people will be more receptive than our families, which is one of the reasons as to why activism can be so rewarding, especially for those of us with unreceptive friends or family members.

Always remember that there is a huge, supportive vegan community (especially online) that is always there to offer support, advice and help.

ONE PERSON CAN'T MAKE A DIFFERENCE

One of the most worrying aspects of this excuse is that if everyone had this attitude absolutely nothing would have positively changed. Imagine if Mandela, Rosa Parks or Martin Luther King Jr. had said, "but one person can't make a difference."



Of course one person can make a difference. In fact, sometimes it only takes one person to make a difference and to inspire a thousand minds. A movement is always made up of individuals and it's the cumulative effort of these individuals that creates change.

It really comes down to the idea of supply and demand, every time we buy a vegan

product we are changing what is being demanded and voting with our wallet for the kind of world that we want to create. As more and more people demand vegan options, more and more vegan options will be produced, and this is already happening!

There is no denying that this movement is growing exponentially and this is because thousands of individuals are looking at their own actions and making the switch to veganism. After all, we are morally accountable for the actions that we make as individuals and regardless of what other people are doing, we have a responsibility to address the impact of our own actions and assess whether or not our lifestyle choices need to be changed. By going vegan you're fiercely stating "not in my name" to the industries that use and kill animals.

If everyone had always had the attitude "one person can't make a difference", then we would still have slavery and apartheid. It's precisely because individuals, who at that time represented the minority, stood up and spoke out against these injustices that progress was made. It's now up to us to do the same in order to save the animals, the planet and indeed ourselves. We can all make a difference.

THANK YOU FOR READING!

Thank you for coming to the end of this e-book and for spending your time learning about these excuses and how to respond to them. I truly believe that armed with this information you as an individual have the power to be a strong voice for the animals and have the skills and capabilities to be an immensely powerful vegan advocate and activist. All it takes is for you to plant a seed to change the lives of many.

My animal rights organisation Surge runs a campus-rep programme, so if you're a student, be sure to sign up here and get the conversations going on campus.

Thank you again so much for reading, and I hope this e-book has been able to help you.

Ed